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THE STORY OF THE  
ATLANTIC COAST LINE

1830-1930

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# The Story of the Atlantic Coast Line



1830....1930



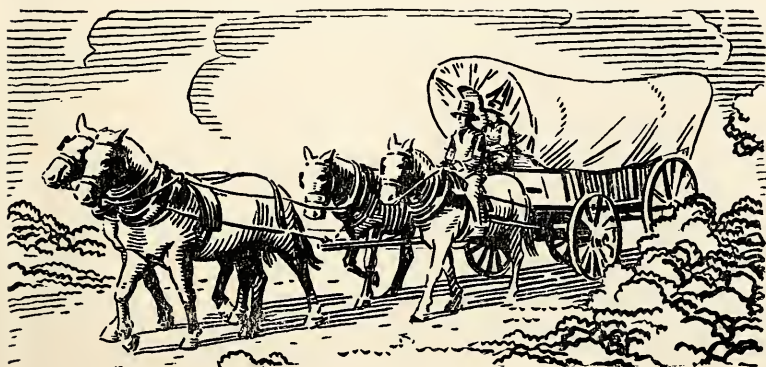


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# The Story of the Atlantic Coast Line

ON February 10, 1830, a little company of progressive people of Petersburg, Virginia, obtained from the General Assembly of Virginia a charter for the construction of a railroad from Petersburg "to some convenient point on the North Carolina line." When completed in 1833 the new railroad reached from Petersburg to a point one and one-half miles below the falls of the Roanoke River near Weldon, North Carolina, a distance of 59 miles.

Constructed as a community enterprise to attract trade to Petersburg, the Petersburg Railroad was the earliest of more than 100 short, disconnected, railroads that were later brought together into the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad to form a single unified system between the North and the South, with a network of lines serving the six Southeastern states, which brought into actual being that "Great Highway of the Union" envisaged by the founders of the Petersburg Railroad.



Throughout their history the roads comprising the Atlantic Coast Line have been pioneers, pushing new lines of rails from established settlements, cities and ports, back into the undeveloped wilderness; making possible the utilization of natural resources, the development of profitable agriculture, and the establishment of new industries.

The pioneer tradition persists. In recent years new railroads that have stirred the imagination and called to mind the exploits and hardships of the early railroad builders have been constructed into sections as yet undeveloped. But there is other, less spectacular, work that is of even greater importance. Present day transportation demands double track, automatic block signals and train-control, heavy rail, substantial ballast, permanent structures, adequate terminal facilities, ample modern equipment, and men who are transportation experts; and the Atlantic Coast Line has been a pioneer in providing them.

To this progressiveness, that has been a distinguishing characteristic of the Atlantic Coast Line, there has been added the doctrine of sound and conservative business practice, and well considered judgment. The result is to be found in a railroad system that furnishes transportation of the highest type to an empire that is still in the making.

The construction of the Petersburg Railroad, and of many of the other railroads that later became a part of the Atlantic Coast Line, had its beginning in the struggle for trade supremacy and advantage between cities and sections along the South Atlantic Coast that dates back to colonial times.





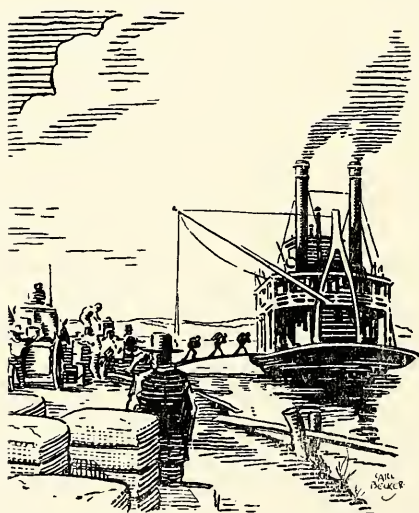
One hundred years ago the sections along the coast were already old. The seaport cities had been built upon the trade of the rich agricultural lands along the coast and inland waterways that had first been put into cultivation. But the fertility of these lands was being depleted. Furthermore, the Piedmont sections to the West and, across the mountains, the rich

valleys of the rivers flowing to the Gulf, were attracting an ever growing number of settlers. It was vital to the life of the coastal cities that they should secure the trade of these new sections.

Transportation was the controlling factor of the situation. Those planters along the coast and rivers could float their products to market, a slow and costly process, but the only one available. Those in the interior were compelled to haul their crops to the nearest navigable water, a process so expensive as to preclude any but the most valuable commodities. Lack of cheap over-land transportation prevented the development of the Piedmont districts; the fact that navigable rivers did not always bring down to the coastal

cities the produce from the sections which each city considered its rightful trade territory made the merchants eager for some means that would enable them to overcome the handicaps of water transportation and to attract the trade of the rich new inland settlements.

At or near the head of navigation of most of the principal streams important trading centers had grown up. To



these points the produce of the Piedmont and mountain districts was brought on pack horses or by wagon to be loaded on boats or rafts and taken to the ports for shipment abroad or to the markets of the North and East. A number of the early railroads were constructed with the view of intercepting the trade of the back country at the head of river navigation so as

to divert it to the cities or sections that furnished the capital with which the various railroads were built. Richmond, Petersburg and Norfolk competed for the trade of parts of Virginia and, to a certain extent, of North Carolina, lying west of the Coastal Plain; Norfolk and Wilmington were in competition for the trade of certain districts of North Carolina; Charleston and Wilmington both



wanted the produce of the upper Pee Dee River sections; Savannah and Charleston vied with each other in their effort to secure the business of the Savannah River Valley.

The construction of the Dismal Swamp Canal which made it possible for the produce of certain sections of North Carolina tributary to the Roanoke, Neuse and Tar Rivers to be brought by boat to Norfolk, gave Norfolk an advantage over Richmond, Petersburg and Wilmington. Competition for the trade moving by the canal was later partly responsible for the construction of two of the early railroads that are now part of the Atlantic Coast Line system.

Another determining factor in the building of these and other early roads was the increasing volume of through passenger traffic between the North and the South which promised substantial revenues.

### *Early Railroads Were Community Enterprises*

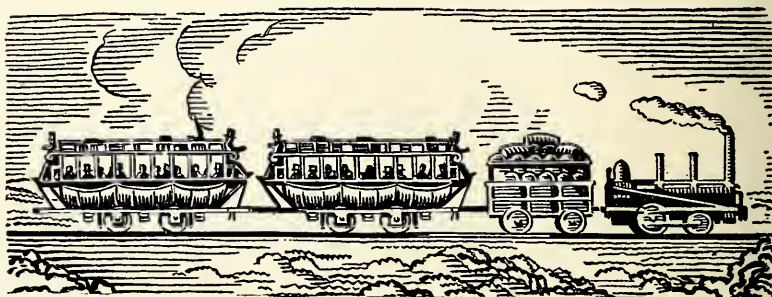
Like the Petersburg Railroad many of the early railroads that later became a part of the Atlantic Coast Line were strictly community or sectional enterprises. They were built by local capital, augmented in some cases by state funds, and were officered and manned by local people. From the outset they were essential parts of the economic life of their respective communities. Every person along their rails had a direct personal interest in them. Conceived as a relief for conditions that were rapidly becoming intolerable they gave new impetus to agriculture, industry and trade and became increasingly important as time went on.

## 100 YEARS OF PROGRESS

The Petersburg Railroad was completed in the fall of 1833, and almost at once justified the optimistic predictions of its founders. Business was good from the outset and the traffic steadily increased.

The success of the Petersburg Railroad demonstrated the advantages of railroads over other transportation and resulted in a movement to connect Petersburg and Richmond by rail. On March 14, 1836, the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad was chartered to build a line between the two points named. Construction began in the spring of the same year, and in May 1838, the line was in operation.

On January 3, 1834, the people of Wilmington, North Carolina, secured a charter for the construction of the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad. The idea at first was to join Wilmington and Raleigh, N. C., but the people of Raleigh would not subscribe to the capital stock so the railroad was built to Weldon, N. C., near the head of navigation on the Roanoke River, and only a short distance from the terminus of the Petersburg Railroad. In 1855 the name of



the Company was changed to the Wilmington and Weldon.

Money was scarce and many difficulties had to be overcome but the railroad was finally completed and put in operation on March 19, 1840. Covering a distance of 161 miles it was at that time the longest railroad in the world.

The construction of these three lines, while undertaken separately and for the principal purpose of attracting trade to the three larger cities served, formed, in connection with the line of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac north of Richmond, an important north and south route, and made it possible to travel by rail from Accomac Creek in Virginia to Wilmington, N. C., although change of cars was necessary at all terminal points, as there was no track connection between the three railroads. During the War between the States such connection between the Petersburg and the Richmond and Petersburg was made as a war measure, but it was not until 1866-67 that the charters of the roads were amended to permit a permanent connection of the rails of the two lines.

From Wilmington, steamers operated by the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad, ran to Charleston, S. C. This rail-water line proved to be popular because it furnished the most direct route between the South and the East, and greatly shortened the time required for the trip.

The largest revenue of the three roads in the early days was, generally speaking, derived from local passenger traffic, although through passenger traffic formed an increasingly important item and before 1860 far exceeded local traffic.

The cheap and light construction of the early roads was not suited for the handling of heavy freight traffic and maintenance charges required the expenditure of unexpectedly large amounts of current income. As a result the stockholders received scant dividends and there was considerable dissatisfaction. Heavier rail and equipment were gradually acquired as funds became available, however, and the roads were thus able to handle the growing traffic.

The history of the roads in North Carolina and Virginia is closely paralleled by that of the roads constructed about the same time in South Carolina and Georgia. Trade competition between Wilmington, N. C., Charleston, S. C., and Savannah, Ga., was responsible for the construction of the Wilmington and Manchester, later known as the Wilmington, Columbia and Augusta; the Northeastern of South Carolina; the Cheraw and Darlington; the Atlantic and Gulf, and other lines that were pushed out into fertile back country.

### *The Beginning of a Modern Railroad System*

The War between the States, while it stimulated traffic and brought, at first, large earnings for some of the railroads, proved disastrous for all. The Richmond and Petersburg, the Petersburg, and the Wilmington and Weldon, connecting Richmond with a section that furnished large quantities of supplies for Lee's armies, were, in effect, the "Bread Line of the Confederacy." Their importance was further magnified by the fact that Wilmington was the principal, and for a long time the only, open port that



could be used by blockade runners bringing essential supplies for the forces of the Confederacy. Fort Fisher, commanding the mouth of the Cape Fear River below Wilmington, was of utmost importance to the Confederate plan of strategy, and the railroads connecting Wilmington and Richmond enabled the quick transport of troops and supplies.

During the latter part of the war, considerable sections of the three railroads were torn up and dismantled by the opposing forces. Much of the equipment was destroyed, bridges and buildings were burned and many early and important records were lost.

The railroads in Georgia and parts of South Carolina suffered even greater damage and some of them came out of the war with "nothing but their rights of way." There was inevitably a period of financial reorganization in which the beginning of the Atlantic Coast Line system took form.

In 1869, a group of far-sighted Baltimore capitalists acquired an interest in the Wilmington and Weldon, spent large sums in its rehabilitation, and were successful in restoring its earning capacity. Later, controlling interests were secured in connecting roads to the north and south



including the Petersburg, the Richmond and Petersburg, the Wilmington, Columbia and Augusta, the Northeastern Railroad of South Carolina and the Cheraw and Darlington. This resulted in establishing a unified policy of management for the affiliated roads, although they retained their corporate identity.

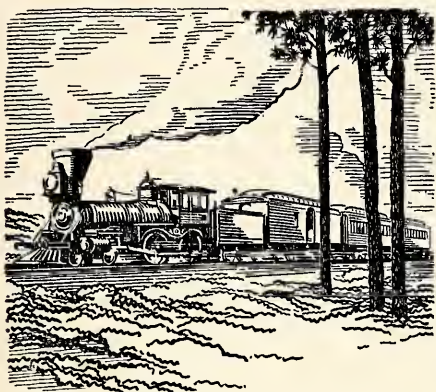
### *How the System Got Its Name*

For many years prior to this time the route comprised by these railroads had been known as the "Weldon Route." About 1871 the term "Atlantic Coast Line" was adopted because the roads so closely paralleled the Atlantic Ocean. This was at first merely a designation of a route. The companies forming the route, however, used the term on their locomotives, in addition to their own names.

Until 1886, the lines south of Wilmington had tracks five feet wide, while those to the north were standard gauge. When through sleeping cars to and from Florida were inaugurated it was necessary to change trucks under the cars at Wilmington. All freight had to be transferred at that point. On an appointed day in 1886, the tracks of the lines south of Wilmington were changed to standard gauge, without accident or interference with business. This removed the last obstacle to through rail transportation between the Southeast and other parts of the country.

At that time much of the freight to New York and other Eastern points moved by the Wilmington and Weldon to Weldon, thence to Norfolk, and to destination by steamer. Recognizing the advantages that the section





along the Carolina Coast offered for the production of early vegetables the management undertook to provide a route that would make it possible to market these perishable products in the large Eastern cities. As a result the lines making up the all-rail route be-

tween Charleston, Wilmington and New York established in 1887 fast rail service known as the "Atlantic Coast Despatch" between South Atlantic points and New York. Special cars were built for this service, and the insignia, consisting of a large circle enclosing the words "Atlantic Coast Despatch" has become familiar to hundreds of thousands of people through its continued appearance on cars of the Atlantic Coast Line.

The route of the "Atlantic Coast Line" at that time was from Richmond to Wilmington, thence to Florence and Charleston, S. C. In 1885, however, the Wilmington and Weldon undertook the construction of what was called the "Fayetteville Cut-off," from Contentnea, N. C., to Fayetteville, N. C., and thence, later, to Pee Dee, S. C., on the Wilmington, Columbia and Augusta. This new line materially shortened the distance and running time and became the main line of the Atlantic Coast Line.

*The Period of Consolidation*

In 1898 the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad was authorized by the legislature of Virginia to purchase the Petersburg Railroad and to name the resulting consolidation, totalling less than 100 miles of line, the "Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company of Virginia."

In the same year the South Carolina legislature chartered the "Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company of South Carolina" to absorb the Wilmington, Columbia and Augusta, the Northeastern, the Cheraw and Darlington, the Manchester and Augusta, and the Florence Railroad. This resulted in the consolidation of about 700 miles of line of which 600 were located in South Carolina.

The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company of South Carolina had an existence of only two years. The most important event during this time was the securing of a lease, jointly with the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, of the Georgia Railroad.

On April 21, 1900, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company of South Carolina, the Wilmington and Weldon, the Norfolk and Carolina and other railroads, were sold to and merged into the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company of Virginia, which then changed its name to the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company.

This consolidation extended the lines of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company from Richmond, Va., to Charleston, S. C., with various branch and feeder lines in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

After the War between the States there had been a period of extreme depression for the railroads in Georgia, Florida and Alabama. Through the efforts of Henry B. Plant, a number of railroads in this territory had been brought together under the name of the Savannah, Florida and Western Railway Company, otherwise known as the "Plant System." This system had a main line from Charleston to Port Tampa, Fla., from Savannah to Montgomery, Ala., and numerous branch lines in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Alabama.

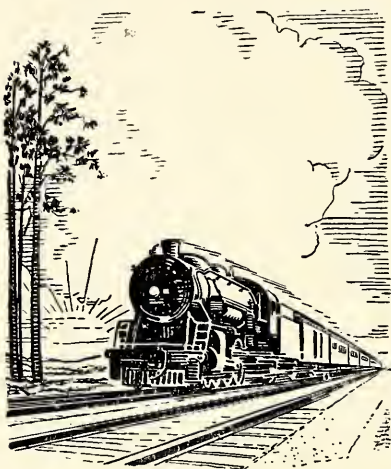
### *New Lines Aid Development*

In 1902 the Plant System was acquired by the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company and this purchase gave the Atlantic Coast Line substantially its present form. While there have been no further large individual increases in mileage since that time new lines constructed and purchased

during the past 27 years have brought the total mileage from 4,138 in 1903 to 5,153 miles in 1930.

Each of these lines performed a valuable service in opening up new areas to development, or in making Coast Line service available to sections in need of additional transportation. Thus Fort Myers, Fla.,





prior to 1903, was an isolated village, but with the aid of transportation furnished by the completion of a railroad by the Atlantic Coast Line it made a vigorous and rapid growth and soon became an important city.

The construction of a line of road from Haines City to Sebring, Fla., and later to Moore Haven, Fla., through territory entirely undeveloped and almost uninhabited at the time, resulted in the development of the Scenic Highlands, one of the show places of Florida, and one of the large citrus producing sections of the State, and also made possible the development of the rich lands west of Lake Okeechobee.

Other lines constructed or purchased performed much the same service in other places.

Of even greater importance, however, was the steady improvement in the entire transportation plant of the Coast Line that was made through successive years. From the time the first interest in the constituent companies of the Atlantic Coast Line was acquired it has been the policy of the management to provide railroad facilities to meet every transportation need of the territory and thus contribute most to its growth and prosperity.

Millions of dollars were spent for double track, heavy rail, ballast, new motive power and other equipment and all the accessories that go to make up an efficient railroad. As a result the Coast Line steadily improved its service.

### *Recent Improvements*

Following this policy an extensive program of improvement was begun shortly after the return of the railroads from Government operation in 1920 that has resulted in the spending of \$89,590,278 up to December 31, 1929. After deducting all retirements this represents an actual addition to the property of \$80,131,143.

This program of improvement embraced the purchase of large amounts of equipment, the completion of double track between Richmond and Jacksonville and at other points; the construction of a line from Perry to Monticello, Fla.; from Thonotosassa to Vitis, Fla., and from Immokalee to Everglades, Fla., as well as construction of a line from Bradenton to Sarasota, Fla., and thence to a point near Fort Ogden; also construction of a line from Fort Myers to Collier City, Fla.

All of these lines opened up new territory which promise to become heavy producers of traffic and, like other lines constructed by the Coast Line, paved the way for agricultural, industrial and recreational development.

Construction of double track began in 1904 and was continued from year to year with the growth of traffic. Points first selected were important junctions and terminals where the volume of traffic was heavy and where



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## 100 YEARS OF PROGRESS

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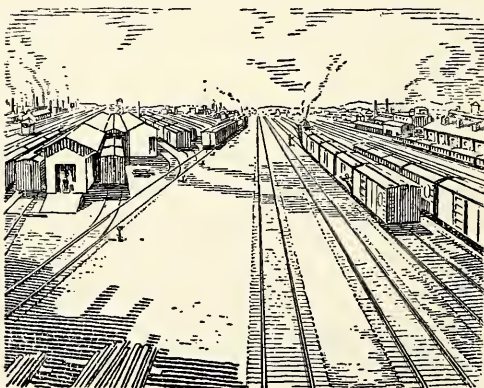
double track would facilitate the in and outbound movement.

In the fall of 1925 double track was completed between Richmond, Va., and Jacksonville, Fla., automatic signals being installed currently with construction.

Since that time the Coast Line has constructed double track between Moncrief and Yukon, Fla.; between Orange City Junction and Sanford, Fla.; between Winter Park and Orlando, Fla.; between Tampa and Uceta, Fla., and between Dunnellon and Vitis, Fla., on its West Coast line.

Practically all of the Atlantic Coast Line main line is equipped with modern train dispatching telephone circuits that enable the utmost efficiency in directing train movement. Practically all main line is ballasted with gravel, crushed stone or slag, and 100 pound steel rail 39 feet long, is the standard used.

The Coast Line is notable for its long stretches of straight tracks, few and easy curves and light grades. There



are no tunnels and no rock cuts. The fills are broad and the drainage is not surpassed by that of any railroad in America.

The territory that the Coast Line serves is aptly known as the Na-



tion's Garden. Here bountiful crops of fruits and vegetables are produced at a season of the year when the big markets of the North, East and West offer the best prices.

### *Atlantic Coast Line Standards of Service*

One of the most important services rendered by the Atlantic Coast Line has been in making possible the growth and expansion of fruit and vegetable growing in the Southeast. The value of these products depends, of course, entirely upon fast and reliable transportation to the great consuming markets. Recognizing the vast possibilities of the sections it serves, the Coast Line has developed a type of service that carries perishable products from its territory to the markets of the country in the shortest possible time. By extending its rails into new areas suited for production of fruits and vegetables, as for example, in the case of the line from Haines City to Moore Haven, Florida, it has made development possible and encouraged the settlement of hitherto unproductive areas.

In spite of the development that has taken place along the Coast Line, the resources of the sections it serves have, literally, hardly been scratched. The ability of this vast garden to increase its output of fruits and vegetables is limited only by the quantities that can profitably be marketed. And its proximity to the great consuming centers, with fast service over the Coast Line, gives it an advantage that is attracting increasing numbers of skilled fruit and vegetable growers and other specialized farmers.

The passenger service of the Atlantic Coast Line has,

like the freight service, been developed to meet highly exacting demands. Long before the formation of the present system, the constituent roads made up the most direct route between Florida and other parts of the Southeast and the North. In 1887 these roads established the Florida Special, operating between New York and Florida, which was, so far as can be learned, the first de luxe tourist train in the world. It has been continued every season since that time, and is the dean of all fine tourist trains.

Coast Line passenger trains have long set a standard that appeals to the most discriminating taste. A schedule of 23 1/3 hours between New York and Florida—the fastest service ever offered—was established for the season 1929-30.

The Atlantic Coast Line has long been known for its progressiveness in keeping its facilities adequate to handle all traffic. Especial care is taken to provide ample motive power and equipment suited to the needs of traffic and the climate. The lounge cars, for example, on the Havana Special were built especially for that train and are unique in their comfort, fittings, and appearance. So with the freight equipment. Ample numbers of box and ventilated cars are owned and the Coast Line is one of the largest stockholders of the Fruit Growers Express, the agency through which the larger number of refrigerator cars are supplied to the Southeast.

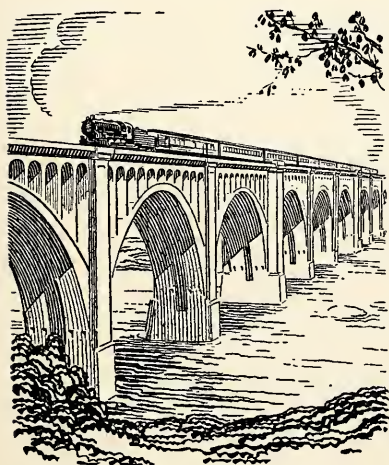
On December 1, 1929, the Atlantic Coast Line owned 1,021 locomotives, 32,696 freight equipment cars, 798 passenger equipment cars and 1,840 work equipment cars.

The Coast Line is one of the largest taxpayers in the Southeast. In 1929 its tax accruals amounted to \$6,240,000. This represented an increase of about 214% of the amount of taxes paid in 1919.

The employees of the Atlantic Coast Line have always been known for their loyalty and efficiency. The close ties of a common interest have bound them all into the Coast Line family, whose members work and live together in a unity that is seldom found. Thirty-four men have worked for the Coast Line 50 years or more, and 1,384 have been in its service 25 years or longer.

The Atlantic Coast Line is closely affiliated with the Charleston and Western Carolina Railway and the Northwestern Railroad of South Carolina. It owns a majority of stock of the Louisville and Nashville; the Columbia, New-

berry and Laurens; the Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast; the Tampa Southern; the Fort Myers Southern and other railroads. Together with the Louisville and Nashville it leases the Georgia Railroad and the Clinchfield Railroad, and controls through ownership and under the lease of the Georgia Railroad a majority of stock in the Atlanta and West Point.



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## 100 YEARS OF PROGRESS

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Through the Louisville and Nashville it is interested in the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis, and has a lease-hold interest in the Western Railway of Alabama and other lines. These railroads, in connection with the rails of the Atlantic Coast Line, have a total mileage of 14,480.

The Atlantic Coast Line is also interested in the Peninsular and Occidental Steamship Company, operating a line of steamers between Port Tampa, Key West and Havana, and the Chesapeake Steamship Company which operates steamers between Baltimore and Norfolk, Richmond and West Point, Va. Indirectly, it is interested in Pan-American Airways, Inc., and certain of its trains furnish connections at Miami with planes of this company.

The Atlantic Coast Line, however, is not merely a big railroad. The constituent companies of the Atlantic Coast Line were built and operated by the people of the sections they served, and when merged into the present organization their employees brought with them that tradition of loyalty to their employers, pride in their occupation and intimate knowledge of the people and transportation needs of their communities, which makes the Atlantic Coast Line so integral a part of the economic life of the Southeast.

The fortunes of the Coast Line are those of the people of the Southeast. It has prospered with them when times were good; it has suffered with them when times were bad. It has grown with the Southeast because its management has conscientiously devoted every effort and all the Company's resources to anticipating and meeting the transportation needs of its patrons.

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